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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HELSINKI 000733

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SUBJECT: TFLE01: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES LEBANON CRISIS WITH
FOREIGN MINISTER TUOMIOJA

Classified By: Poloff David Allen Schlaefel for Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Ambassador Ware met with Finland's Foreign Minister, Erkki Tuomioja, on July 31. Tuomioja said that his just-completed trip to the Middle-east confirmed his view that Israel could not achieve its military goals, and that an immediate cease-fire followed by a comprehensive settlement along the lines of UNSCR 1559 were essential. Tuomioja called the Rome Conference a success, and indicated that the EU was poised to move quickly on plans for an international stabilization force once a cease-fire was in place. France, Spain, and Italy had agreed to contribute significant forces to the proposed new UN mission. Tuomioja also said that Damascus has indicated it was ready to help defuse the crisis, perhaps by agreeing to the removal of Hizballah's large rockets and launchers to Syria where they can be monitored and neutralized. The Ambassador expressed regret that Tuomioja had made offensive remarks in a Finnish news magazine about American concern for Lebanese civilian casualties; Tuomioja apologized for the remarks, stating that he had been caught off-guard by reporters and did not mean to imply any lack of American concern for the tragedy in Lebanon. End Summary.

12. (C) Tuomioja told Ambassador Ware that he has been very affected by his trip to the region last week. He said that the suffering in Israel, Lebanon, and Gaza was "extraordinary," and that a comprehensive solution was imperative. He had met with myriad senior Israeli officials and tried to correct any misinterpretation that Tel Aviv had carte blanche from the international community to continue offensive operations for another two to five weeks. Tuomioja opined that although he was no military expert, he had to believe that Israel would not (and could not) achieve its military goals, and that a political solution was necessary. Moreover, he feared that each new errant missile or bomb only generated more sympathy in the Arab street for Hizballah and Muslim extremism, and that moderate Arab leaders in the region were increasingly anxious about this. The FM said that he was displeased with media coverage of the Rome Conference. In his opinion, it was not a failure, but useful because "we focused on all the things that we needed to in any case," and laid the groundwork for the meetings that were taking place in New York and Brussels this week. Tuomioja thanked the Ambassador for the important role the Secretary had played.

13. (C) The Ambassador expressed condolences for death of the Finnish peacekeeper in Lebanon, and then addressed preparations for the Extraordinary Meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council tomorrow in Brussels.

She agreed with Tuomioja about the efficacy of the Rome Conference, and emphasized the broad agreement in Rome that any cease-fire must be permanent and sustainable; it is important that the cycle of violence be broken, and that any agreement must include the disarming of Hizballah. If it doesn't, the cycle will continue, and any cease-fire brokered today would only be broken again in the near future, with further civilian suffering and tragedy on all sides. Any comprehensive settlement must address this, and incorporate actions, not mere words. Citing the President's and Secretary's expressions of concern for the suffering of the

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Lebanese people, the Ambassador reiterated U.S. regret for the loss of civilian lives in both Lebanon and Israel. She said the U.S. was looking forward to discussing the composition of an international stabilization force with our EU partners and asked the FM what his views on such a force were.

14. (C) The FM agreed with the Ambassador that any lasting settlement should be in line with UNSCR 1559; but he opined that the civilian tragedy unfolding in Lebanon was such that it was necessary to call for an immediate cease-fire first. The details of any comprehensive settlement would be difficult to negotiate, but the first step in resolving the crisis was to stop the immediate violence, and that there was broad agreement within the EU on this. Tuomioja remarked that while it was impossible to physically eliminate Hizballah, the group could be neutralized. Neither Syria nor Iran had any interest in the current situation continuing or escalating; in fact, the EU had "indications" that Damascus was looking for an opportunity to help defuse the crisis, perhaps by pressuring Hizballah to move its heavy missiles and launchers into Syria where they could be effectively controlled and further provocations stopped. The FM said that he was encouraged by the Secretary's remarks that she

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was hopeful that a cease-fire could be brokered by the end of the week. He also repeatedly emphasized that any lasting solution for Lebanon had to include Gaza as well.

15. (C) On the international stabilization force, Tuomioja said that he had seen estimates of the amount of troops needed ranging from 10,000 to 15,000; if indeed close to 20,000 troops are needed, it may be difficult to find them. France, Spain, and Italy have indicated willingness to contribute significant "battle-ready" forces. Turkey will also likely contribute troops, but Tuomioja believed it unlikely that Egypt or any other Arab country would participate, although Indonesia and other non-Arab Muslim countries might. Germany (due to historic sensitivities) and the US and UK (due to political and security realities) could not play leading roles in the stabilization force, and this hurt the international community's ability to put a solid force together. The FM said that it was imperative for the force's credibility that it be a new UN mission (not UNIFIL), and that the troops be properly equipped and trained to defend themselves; EU publics should realize the danger involved in the operation and the real possibility of further casualties.

16. (C) The Ambassador then turned to media reports (first reported in the Finnish news magazine Suomen Kuvalehti and subsequently picked up by Reuters) that Tuomioja had alleged that Americans were less worried about the fate of Lebanese civilians than Europeans were. She said that the remarks saddened and offended her, reminding the FM that more than 5000 Americans have died in the Global War on Terror. There are also more than 3 million Americans of Lebanese ancestry, and while the suffering of any people is abhorrent to the U.S., the tragedy in Lebanon is particularly difficult for Americans to countenance. Tuomioja apologized for the remarks, stating that he had been taken by surprise by the reporter's question and that the comments as published were

not what he intended or wished to say; nor had he been given a promised opportunity to edit the story, during which he would have removed the statement. The Ambassador told him that the international media would now focus on every word.

17. (C) Comment: Tuomioja suggested that the EU is poised to move quickly on the stabilization force once a cease-fire is in place; but he also clearly indicated that finding enough troops to flesh out the mission will likely be a significant problem given limited EU capabilities. On his remarks to the media, Tuomioja was apparently somewhat distraught that his poorly chosen words were an issue at a time when the US and EU needed to work together to solve an emergent crisis. However, his long history of off-the-cuff gaffes and rhetorical stumbles, as well as the lack of staffing at senior levels in Finland's MFA, suggest he may need help growing into the role of foreign minister of the EU President country. Post recommends that senior EU officials need to remind the foreign minister that his remarks will now be interpreted as having been vetted by all member states.

18. (C) Comment, cont.: Within hours of the Tuomioja meeting, the Ambassador saw Finland's Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs at a reception. The U/S said that (please protect) Tuomioja, who has been Finland's foreign minister for over 6 years, had just advised his senior staff that he will not continue as FM after next year's general election. End Comment.

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